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IN THE NATION | Tom Wicker

# Spies Real and Unreal

**W**hat's going on here? Not only does the Government seem to be infested with spies; but they aren't even the kind of subversives good Americans have been taught to fear and loathe.

Four mostly ordinary persons were arrested within five days last week and charged with spying for China, Israel and the Soviet Union. Together with last summer's Walker family spy case and other recent espionage scandals, all this must have given a rude shock to those who've bought the idea that it's the press and undetected Communists who "give away" vital U.S. secrets.

Nor of these cases — all serious breaches of U.S. security and perhaps cumulatively an intelligence disaster — had anything to do with the press or with anyone "leaking" sensitive information to sensation-hungry reporters.

Nor, so far as now appears, were any of the accused spies ideological Communists burrowing away within a Government so riddled with leftist intellectuals, pinko do-gooders and Trilateral internationalists that no secrets were safe anyway.

Instead, while the motives of those charged were no doubt different in each case and complex in all, they appear to have been well paid and to have given good value for their money. And more arrests, at least one official has said, may be forthcoming.

No one can take satisfaction from these cases; if the charges are proven, they would represent too much damage to U.S. interests, not to mention the possibility of impaired relations with Israel. But a few comments may be in order from one who lived through the McCarthy-J. Edgar Hoover hysteria about "Communists in Government" and the long history of suspicion and mistrust to which it

gave birth, who was himself a participant in the Pentagon Papers affair, and who has suffered quite enough cheap talk about a "treasonous" press that is not "on our side."

First, and most obvious, the press is not the prime threat to U.S. secrets; to legitimate secrets like those the Pollards are charged with delivering to Israel, it is scarcely a threat at all — except possibly by some accidental disclosure. In the entire history of the U.S. press, including World War II, when one or two serious security breaches occurred, no newspaper ever has damaged American interests to the extent that Larry Wu-Tai Chin is charged with having done, over more than 20 years as a Chinese "mole" inside the C.I.A.

Second, and almost as obvious, the U.S. cannot protect its vital secrets by more and more classification of documents, with the consequent need for more classifiers and more people to be cleared to read the classified material. Aside from the absurdity of having tens of thousands of officials of all ranks authorized to put a classification stamp on everything from newspaper clippings to routine memos, the certain result is the degradation of the very idea of secrecy; where everything is secret, as Justice Potter Stewart once observed, nothing can be truly secret.

The necessity for clearing so many people also overwhelms the security agencies charged with the task. Too many Government workers are not adequately checked before clearance; and too few are rechecked frequently enough or seriously enough after the original clearance.

Being a liberal or a "leftist" or even a Marxist-Leninist is in itself no more a security threat to the U.S. than being a

## How to protect vital secrets

Republican, a Rotarian or a churchgoer. If any of the last three were in a sensitive Government position, or otherwise had access to secrets, and found himself in dire need of money, or liable to blackmail, or in fear for relatives abroad, a spy might be born more easily than in a class taught by a Marxist professor of economics. So witch-hunt groups like Accuracy in Academia are not so much protecting our security as challenging our freedom.

And all those Government security flaps — usually resulting only in more lie detector tests for more people — are essentially measures to stop leaks or to catch leakers, neither of which is the real security problem. Nor will more limits on the Freedom of Information Act or a new official secrets act get at the necessary target. These, too, would be efforts to restrict the public release of information — most of which, inevitably, would not be legitimately secret but only inconvenient or embarrassing to the Government.

The direct passage of real security secrets to foreign governments, by professionals or by coerced victims, is the problem. The Espionage Act provides all the prosecutorial power the Government needs; what's lacking is an effective counterespionage program, not just to lock the barn after the horse has been stolen, but to deter the potential thief. □